

VZCZCXRO4308

RR RUEHAST RUEHBI RUEHLH RUEHNEH RUEHPW
DE RUEHCI #0353 3590808

ZNR UUUUU ZZH

R 240808Z DEC 08

FM AMCONSUL KOLKATA

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 2227

INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC

RUEIDN/DNI WASHINGTON DC

RHEHAAA/NSC WASHINGTON DC

RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA 2722

UNCLAS KOLKATA 000353

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: KIRF PGOV PHUM PREF SOCI IN

SUBJECT: ORISSA ORGANIZATION CANCELS PROPOSED STATE-WIDE CHRISTMAS STRIKE

REF: A. KOLKATA 330

1B. KOLKATA 2

¶1. (SBU) Summary: On December 19 the Laxmanananda Saraswati Shrandhanjali Samiti (LSSS), a body of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) in Orissa, cancelled its proposed statewide strike for December 25. It had previously threatened to strike on the Christian religious holiday if the Orissa state government failed to hasten its investigation into the August 23 killing of the senior VHP leader Laxmanananda Saraswati. The state Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) indicated that it will support the efforts of its governing ally, the Biju Janata Dal (BJD), to ensure peaceful Christmas day celebrations throughout the state.

¶2. (SBU) On December 22 an official in the Orissa state government told post that the administration is taking all precautionary measures to ensure that Christmas is celebrated peacefully in the state. The Home Department source declined to comment on the specific measures being taken but assured post that the measures were "appropriate, lawful and legal" and that the Chief Minister himself is personally involved in the matter. He added that Orissa's Director General of Police has issued several advisories and guidelines to state government police officials to maintain peace, law and order during the Christmas holidays.

¶3. (SBU) The VHP has acquiesced to significant pressure from the Orissa state government, and its Sangh Parivar member BJP, not to strike on Christmas day. On December 22 the BJP State President told post that his party would work with its membership to ensure the peaceful observation of Christmas in the state. He welcomed Chief Minister Patnaik's announcement of additional arrests and continued investigation into the August 23 murder of Saraswati. Before the VHP had cancelled its strike, its Orissa working president had told post that the VHP was contemplating the wisdom and effectiveness of a December 25 strike as there would be little visible effect since Christmas is a holiday. Strikes in India are usually called to disrupt commerce and shut down normal city activities.

¶4. (SBU) According to the media, a delegation of the Orissa Minority Forum led by the Archbishop of Cuttack-Bhubaneswar met Chief Minister Patnaik on December 20 and urged him to provide sufficient security for Christian establishments in Kandhamal and throughout the state. On December 22 the Orissa Young Men's Christian Association General Secretary confirmed that the Orissa government had taken visible, positive measures to ensure security of the Christian community.

PAYNE